



Sacramento Ethnic Communities Survey - Greek Oral Histories 1983/146

Oral interview of
Eugene Fotos

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This is Diane Holt of the Sacramento History Center's Ethnic Community Survey interviewing Eugene Fotos at my home near American River Drive in East Sacramento. Today is March 22, 1984. Gene Fotos is one of the leaders of the Greek community and a member of a large multi-talented family who have all taken active roles in community activities. Gene tells us about his parents, his family, including an interesting story about his mother, who immigrated via Cuba as a picture bride. He describes the group called GAPA and his activities during his years serving as parish council president. He also tells us about the Greek Food Festival.

Diane: When did your father first arrive in America?

Mr. Fotos: 1910.

Diane: And in Sacramento? Did, he didn't come straight to Sacramento, did he?

Mr. Fotos: Pretty much, he might have made a few stops on the way, but his older brother was in the Sacramento area. So, working for the Southern Pacific Railroad at the time. So he had someone he could meet. He worked in and around the Sacramento area, and the West Coast with the railroads.

Diane: With the railroads, huh?

Mr. Fotos: Initially, uh huh.

Diane: Why did he leave Greece?

Mr. Fotos: Well as so many of the other immigrants that did leave their homeland, he left for, to come temporarily, as so many rightly came temporarily to earn some money and go back and have a better life there and of course, to marry their sisters, to provide the dowry that was much needed in those days. And that was initially the thought when he first came over. Temporary.

Diane: And the newspaper clipping, I think said your uncle made fifty cents a day back in 1906. The first brother of your family that came?

Mr. Fotos: Oh, that's right! That's right, exactly, right, right.

Diane: And saved to send for your father.

Mr. Fotos: And then later, boy, they really made the big money, and then it was ten cents an hour then, a dollar a day, a dollar a day for the railroad.

Diane: Do you know what they did with the railroad? Did they lay –

Mr. Fotos: Yes, they laid track, they laid track, and actually in those days a lot of immigrants worked on the railroads and the section chiefs, the bosses kept them in ethnic groups, and they slept in boxcars, sleeping boxcars, and they had like the Greek gang, the Italian gang, the Chinese gangs and something that really the railroad foreman would take advantage of they pit

the one nationality against the other, and they would say to them “I hear the Italians say that they can unload that gondola car faster than the Greeks can.” So the Greeks would say “well, heck if they can”, so all of a sudden it was the Greeks versus the Italians, or the Italians versus the Chinese, or the Pollacks, and the railroad was getting double the volume of work out of them by using competition, see?

Diane: Sure.

Mr. Fotos: Yeah, they pretty much kept them in ethnic groups when they did, and they did actually laid track.

Diane: Okay. How long did they work for the railroad, your family?

Mr. Fotos: Oh, I’d say in my father’s case, he probably worked for the railroad oh, not too many years, maybe, two or three years, and then he also worked in restaurants. In fact, he tells me, he told me, that probably it was maybe around 1915, he worked as a bus boy at the St. Frances Hotel. Yeah, about 1915.

Diane: In San Francisco?

Mr. Fotos: Yeah, in San Francisco. He was there a couple of years.

Diane: And then moved back to Sacramento?

Mr. Fotos: And then moved back to Sacramento, right. In the meantime, in between, he was, he volunteered for the Army, in World War One, yeah. He was quite proud to serve in the American Army. Even though his first love was Greece, still he loved it here in America, and as a matter of fact when he died, he requested that in his coffin be his GAPA hat, the Greek American Progressive Association hat, and the American Legion hat. To be buried with him, yeah, he was real proud.

Diane: Oh, how about your mother?

Mr. Fotos: My mother. Okay, my mother is from the area of Sparta.

Diane: Is that where your father came from too?

Mr. Fotos: Of Laconia. No, my father is from a state called Ilias which is on the western part of the Peleponnesus, about 45 minutes south of Patrai. And my mother and father, of course, do you want me to get into this part?

Diane: Sure.

Mr. Fotos: They didn't know each other, they had never met before they got married. When they met was when she first arrived. And, but, my mother had a sister in San Leandro, California, and my father had met an uncle of my mother's in Sacramento, and one thing and

another, and they just, knowing that these fellows that came from Greece wanted to marry a Greek girl, at that time, because there weren't too many Greek woman here, so there were all these type of fix-up type of marriages, I've got a niece, I've got a sister, I've got a daughter, you know, type of thing. So that's how it worked out and the, my mother's uncle says "I have a nice niece back in the village of Kiparissia." And they exchanged a letter or two. In fact, it was picture postcards, and they exchanged picture postcards of one another, which was a popular type of communication in those days. And so, they arranged for her passage, and my mother caught the boat in Greece, and arrived in Havana, Cuba, in 1931.

Diane: Why did she go to Cuba?

[Counter 50]

Mr. Fotos: Okay, that's a good question, why not New York? At that time, the immigration, the ethnic immigration quota for the Europeans had been tremendous lessened, and very few were allowed in the New, in through the United States ports. So they had to find another port of entry, and Greeks at that time, and Europeans were using Canada. They were using Mexico, and Cuba was evidently a popular one. So the ship came into Havana, Cuba. So she came in actually through the quota of Cuba, Cuba's quota. My father took off with a Model, 1929 Model A Ford from Sacramento, with my mother's uncle who was going back as a chaperon and they drove all the way from Sacramento to Florida and they went down to Key West, Florida, and they put that little old 1929, two door, Model A Ford, on kind of a fairy boat, you might say, one that took automobiles, anyway. They went to Havana and then waited for the big boat to come

from Europe which it did arrive and my mother by the way, was not the only bride, mail order bride on that boat. There were several other Greek ladies on there, and coincidentally, several of those ladies are still living and they correspond, one lives in Portland, another lives in San Francisco, and they all met husbands, basically the same way. So, my father and mother got married there legally, and then also there was a priest, a Greek priest, in Havana, and they got married, they didn't have a church, but yet they had a priest there when they got married, in Havana, Cuba, and stay there several months. As a matter of fact, I asked my father, "gee's that was a nice long honeymoon, four months." And he said, "well, it wasn't that, I had to come back" because he had a business by then, and I'll tell you about that. But they were trying to hold him there and the government, and the Cuban government was trying to extort him for more money, more money, and finally my father had to go to the American Ambassador, the American Embassy to get my mother out. He said, "Well before she goes to America she has to fix all her teeth, she's got to do this," all that, everything that costs money. Eventually, they drove back to Sacramento and my mother came back in the family way. By this time, by the time they got back it was probably five months, and she was pregnant with me! Yeah, she was pregnant with me. I was born September of 32 and they had gotten married in December of 31. So you see that's just a ten month period right there!

Diane: That's right.

Mr. Fotos: So they didn't completely just waste their time there, evidently. [chuckles] So my father came back to his, [hard to hear, counter 76] bride to Sacramento, show off his new little bride. My mother weighed, my father says, 96 pounds at that time.

Diane: Oh my goodness, was she a lot younger than your father?

Mr. Fotos: Okay. My father got married at the age of 40. My mother at the time was 21 years old, 21, and just as a little sidelight, highlight, of course the brides were looking over the edge of the ship, seeing these men down there, which one was theirs they were wondering? So my father saw my mother and he said “my goodness, she’s just a young little girl” in his eyes, and he told her “Thespol” [spelling ?] that’s my mother’s name, “I’m a lot older than you, as you can see” although he didn’t look his age, even to his death, “you don’t have to stay, if you want, you can go back and I’ll pay your passage back.” And my mother says “No, my mother sent me here to marry you and I’m going to marry you.” And, they got married in 1931 and really lived happily ever after with the typical trials and tribulations of the average married couple and more so because I may bring some of these other items up. So they were married, my father passed away in 1975, so they were married 44 years, and raised six children.

Diane: Six children, my goodness. How long was your father in Sacramento, or, what age was he when he came from Greece? Because it sounds like he waited to become established before he got married.

Mr. Fotos: Okay. Alright, my father was born in 1891 and he arrived in Sacramento in 1910. Actually, I think he hit New York around, the latter part of 1909, but by the time he immigrated a little further, it was about 1910 when he hit Sacramento. So, you figure he was 18, 19 years old. He was born in 91, correct. After he got out of the military in World War One, he opened up a

Second Hand Store in San Francisco for a while before coming back to Sacramento, and then he came to Sacramento. He worked for a short time for another Greek that had, named Paul Maritsas who I'll bring his name up later. His name was Paul Maritsas, he was an older man but he was from the same part of Greece as my father. He had a land clearing company. They cleared land. It was called the Maritsas' Construction Company. That was in the 20s.

[Counter 100]

Mr. Fotos: They would clear lands for roads for the state, for the county, and much of the area around Sacramento that is now developed and possibly this area right here, where we are talking from right now was cleared by Paul Maritsas' Construction Company. He would hire many Greeks of course. After that my father thought to himself, "well, I really should do something else if I want to prosper in this country." So he went to work as a laundry driver, a truck driver for a laundry. He drove for them, it was called the Cascade Laundry. After a while he thought "wait a minute, I've saved some money, I'll buy myself a little truck." He bought himself a truck, and he converted it to a laundry truck. So then he started working for the Cascade Laundry as a commission driver, see? The harder you work, the more business you bring in, the more you make. So, little by little he progressed, and shortly thereafter he thought well, "I can maybe start my own little business." So he opened up a linen supply company, where he furnished linen to restaurants, barbershops, beauty shops, those type of places. And he bought some linen and he rented a garage, just a garage, it was an old three car garage and he called it Fotos' Linen Supply Company. This was in the late 20s, middle to late 20s when he opened up his own Linen Supply Company. Then he bought another truck and he hired another driver, and

what he would do, he would buy the linens and then he would pay the laundry, the Cascade Laundry to wash the linens. He paid them so much and then he'd rent the linens out. Then after a while, then it became the Mason-Cascade Laundry. Then in 19, his business started growing, and the three car garage wasn't really ample. Of course, he used that primarily for storing his linens. He built a laundry, he built a laundry in 1940 on Alhambra Boulevard between U and V in Sacramento. He called it the Alhambra Laundry and Fotos' Linen Supply Company. He had that business until 1951 when he sold it and retired.

Diane: And he had his own fleet of trucks?

Mr. Fotos: And he had his own fleet of trucks, right, right. As a matter of fact, he used to supply all the public schools in Sacramento in those days, the youngster's didn't have to furnish their own bath towels which I understand in some cases they do now. So the school department supplied the bath towels, so you'd have to bid every year against your competition, other linen supply companies and the low bidder would get the business for that year to supply the bath towels for the school, see? So that was a nice little contract. But every year you're on pins and needles hoping you'd get the contract again. Of course, he continued to supply schools and all that type of things, plus World War Two came about, as we all know, from 41 to 45 and he also supplied some of the military bases, Mather Air Force Base, McClellan Air Force Base, as well as the internment camps where the Japanese were interned not too far away from Sacramento, off of Madison Avenue and what is now Highway 80, nearby there. So he was –

Diane: Quite a success.

Mr. Fotos: Yeah, he never made a lot of money. People thought so, that's the sad thing. He had the business, he had a nice beautiful, he had the most beautiful laundry and the most modern laundry in Sacramento. He had, he started out with maybe, in his plant, there maybe with 30 employees when he first opened it, and when he sold it there were 70 employees. But I must say one thing that my father did that I'm quite proud of him, after World War Two there were of course, a number of refugees coming to this country from all over Europe and especially the Greeks were bringing their relatives over as Displaced Persons Refugee Act and my father, the people would come and ask him "can you give my niece a job, my nephew a job?" and he always opened the door and gave a job to these people coming from Greece, and at his own expense sometimes, when he really didn't even need additional help, and he'd do it to help him out. There are several still in Sacramento that still bring it up to me. They are appreciative, just for that little start. Laundry workers didn't make much money. They were making not much more than they used to make 30 years before. However, it was something to give them a little sense of independence. I am proud of my father for that.

Diane: Oh yes. What happened to the Maritsas' Construction Company?

Mr. Fotos: The Maritsas' Construction Company sometime during the Depression it went bankrupt.

Diane: Oh.

Mr. Fotos: Yeah, it went bankrupt, uh huh, yeah. It went bankrupt.

[Counter 150]

Diane: Tell me a little bit about your home, you had six, there were six brothers and sisters, or six of you children, and your mother, anyone else live in the home with you, to help her out?

With six kids.

Mr. Fotos: Okay. You bring up an interesting point. When my mother and father first married, her, my mother's first home and where I was born was on 9th Street between F and G. We lived there until I was four years old. My mother and father have never lived alone as a husband and wife, and later with her children. As soon as my father got married, he had a bachelor brother at the time, his brother Pete, my Uncle Pete, who would work for the Maritsas' Construction Company by the way, but sometimes there wasn't always work, so when he was in town he lived with, my father would say "well, Pete you're going to stay with us." So he lived with my father and mother. Then the second permanent resident in our home, other than our immediate family was a man called, named Sam Bourukous [spelling ?]. Now Sam Bourukous was from the same part of Greece as my father. Of course, they didn't know each other there, but as Greeks are, they said "where you from? Oh, Greek, patriot!", you know. It's just like saying you meet a Californian and you act like, but the Greeks are even more so. So this fellow Sam Bourukous, who just by the way, eight months ago died at the age of 95. He was, he had worked with my father at two different jobs on the railroad and they had met, and he used to live in a hotel downtown. As so many of the old time Greeks in those days did. But they were all

bachelors, practically, and he lived in the State Hotel. Which was located near the Southern Pacific depot or the Amtrak depot now, downtown on about 4th Street, off of I. The State Hotel was owned by a Greek, and so there were a number of Greeks living there. So Sam had a little minor surgery and he was recuperating in a hotel, I don't know if it was an appendix or what, and so my father said to him "Stassis" (that was his name, you know, and in Greek of course) he told him "you shouldn't be here in a hotel, you come over to my house to rest and recuperate, before you go back to work." Well that was over 50 years ago, that that took place and Sam stayed with our family from then on! [Mr. Fotos slapped something, maybe his leg from the sound of it.] He was the man who came to dinner and stayed forever, but he was a jewel. He was better than family. He never married.

Diane: Did mother have to take care of all these, did she do all of the cooking, and cleaning and?

Mr. Fotos: My mother, yes. My mother did the cooking, the washing, well some of the washing, since my father later had a laundry, she was alleviated of some of those chores, although she did still do washing at home. Yes, she did all of the housecleaning, and she'd iron their clothes and she cooked their food, and anything else that a women normally would do for a person, and she never, never complained. I have never heard one complaint from my mother towards my father about how come you keep bringing all these people over to my house. Do you want to hear about more people that lived in our house?

Diane: Sure.

Mr. Fotos: Okay. So Sam and my Uncle Pete. My Uncle Pete and Sam, who we later called Barda Stassis, Uncle Sam, they were our first permanent residents in the very early 30s. And later what happened again, the patrioti thing, my father met some other people from the same state of Greece that as him, and they were called Koyas, their last name. They were three brothers, and they were lumberjacks. Greek lumberjacks, so lumberjacks of course work in the summer, that's primarily when they are doing their work, and into the early fall, and maybe late spring. So actually, they don't really much have more than six months of actually work out there. Come winter time, they're dormant. Well, evidently they were living in a hotels too. My father said "why should you fellows live in hotels, you know, you can come stay with us!" So there were the three brothers. They didn't always all three stay at the house, but there were always at least two, and they were permanent residents for the winter. In summertime they would go back up to the mountains.

Diane: That was an unusual job for Greeks, wasn't it?

Mr. Fotos: Yes it was, yes it really was kind of unusual, you think of Greek lumberjacks. And this was in the 30s and into the 40s. Eventually, one of the lumberjacks, John Koyas, ended up working in the laundry and worked in the laundry for several years.

Diane: And they never married?

[Counter 200]

Mr. Fotos: And they never married. None of the three brothers. Now what they eventually did, they saved their money because they didn't have to pay any rent where they lived, no room and board. My father and mother never collected a nickel from anybody living in the house. And evidently saved a couple of dollars and they went down to Blythe, California, Blythe, I believe, anyway they bought a ranch down there. Sure. They are all deceased now.

Diane: I gather you had a bigger house by this time. Where did they all sleep?

Mr. Fotos: Oh, very interesting. Oh, but let me tell you about one other person too! There was another person, we had the winter boarders, and then we had a summer boarder too. When I say boarder, I use the term loosely, of course, because there was never any payments made. Another Ilioti again, his name was Dan Papademetious, Dan Pappas. He worked in the cannery, the local canneries, Sacramento used to be a center of the canning industry because of all the agricultural areas around here. So he worked in the canneries. In the canneries, oh, they work in the summer. Now Papademetious originally lived in Sacramento, but then he moved to Phoenix, Arizona, with some other relatives, some relatives of his. He'd come back to Sacramento to work the canneries for about seven months of the year, and he stayed at our house. Then come winter he would go back to Phoenix, lived a good warm life in Phoenix during the winter season. Well he was doing this for a number of years, living at our house, and he worked the night shift. The kind of, he would start working probably, the cannery workers they didn't just work eight hours, because they had to get the stuff out, so he might leave for work at six in the evening, and come back at six in the morning. And what would happen, we were little kids then, and as little

kids are, they like to play and we had a big yard at our house, and, but, Barda Dan, as we ended up calling him, he would sleep in the daytime, so consequently, that kind of, we had to be relatively quiet, because Barda Dan was sleeping in the daytime because he had to work in the evenings. When I was in the service, I was in Korea, I get a letter from my sister, and she writes, “guess what?” she says, “Barda Dan is staying at home, at our house 12 months of the year now,” because Papa said to him, “Dan,” you want this in English I guess, don’t you? He says “Dan,” he says “why do you go back to Phoenix every winter? When you do that you lose out on unemployment. You should stay in California and you can draw your unemployment too.” And he said “good idea.” So Barda Dan stayed 12 months of the year and drew his unemployment. Eventually though, these last few years he did move to a hotel downtown with many of the other bachelor Greeks. Our home in 1936, we moved from the home at 9th Street, near F, and my father built a house on a lot on 38th Street, right off McKinley Boulevard. The lot is a little more than a half acre. Actually, quite a large lot for within the city limits. Probably one of the largest in town lots. But in those days the lot, lots were cheaper and it was a very low lot and so he had to haul in a lot of dirt, a lot of dirt. As a little kid, I remember, I was only four years old at the time, when he would go visit the lot site, he had hired a man with horses and they leveled the lot and they were drawing these great big heavy beams across to level the lot. You know, hauling in truck loads of dirt to built up the lot. That’s probably why it had never been built on. My father built a substantially large house, three bedrooms, two baths with a big, almost a full size basement downstairs. So there we were now with three bedrooms, two baths. However, more children were being born in the mean time. I’m the oldest, and we eventually got to six of us. So there was three of us born within the first four years, and then there was a five year hiatus and then three more born. Now, so there we are, when we are in to that house,

by 1937 there were, by 1936 actually, there were three of us brothers and sisters, plus my mother, plus my father, plus my Uncle Pete, plus my Uncle Sam, that made seven, plus Barda Dan in the summer, plus the three lumberjacks in the winter, plus other visitors coming and going and staying weeks and sometimes months. Now we only had three bedrooms. So the basement was utilized periodically also.

[Counter 250]

Mr. Fotos: Well, and then when, after the war, World War Two, my mother's sister came from Greece, one of the, the youngest sister, and she lived with us for a couple of years and also a niece, a cousin of mine, she lived with us for several years, again worked in the laundry too, for a while, until now she is married and has a wonderful and beautiful family now in Oakland. So more children started being born. So in 1945 it was, the house was bursting at the seams literally, my father added upstairs, two more bedrooms and another bath, so now it ended up five bedrooms and three baths, and a big basement, and believe me the house was full. There were, there must have been a period of five to eight years where there were never fewer than 12 people living in that house. By now there were six children, mother and father made eight, a couple of permanent uncles, ten, and by the way another brother of my father, Frank Fotos who was a barber, married, widowed in 1948, lived alone for about six months in his little house and my father says "Frank, it's not good to live alone, come live with us." So in 1949, Uncle Frank moved in and lived with us until he died in 1971. He was a permanent resident and he was a barber in town for 50 years.

Diane: So you had a dormitory in the basement?

Mr. Fotos: Almost. It's incredible, when I was young, we only had the three bedrooms then, at the house, so Uncle Pete, that's my father's brother, and Uncle Sam (Barda Stassi) and I, slept in one room. We had three beds in one room. I had the little youth bed in the middle and my one uncle was at one side and my adopted Uncle Sam was on the other side, and the Koyas brothers, yes, they'd come they'd have to sleep in the basement. We had couches that made into beds, big couches that made into beds. Eventually, we spread out into five bedrooms, but still crowded.

Diane: Oh my, you must have had some Christmas celebrations or some Easter celebrations.

Mr. Fotos: Yes. You are absolutely right. In fact, we still gather at my mother's house.

Diane: Do you barbecue the lamb on Easter?

Mr. Fotos: We have the lamb on Easter and the turkey at Christmas and Thanksgiving. As a matter of fact, Easter and Thanksgiving were key points for other reasons at the household there because springtime would be Easter of course, and that would be the time when we would have Easter upstairs, no we would have Easter downstairs because we had this big basement at my mother's house and it has a stove and a sink and everything down there, so towards the end of spring, around Easter time, we would be moving downstairs so that our Easter meal would usually be at this 14 foot long table. Come Thanksgiving, it would be about the time we moved

upstairs so we would have Thanksgiving upstairs, so that was the moving period, from upstairs to downstairs.

Diane: According to the weather?

Mr. Fotos: Yes.

Diane: How important was church in your childhood? Did you have to go to Greek school? Or what? Were you a regular Sunday church goers? Or just Christmas and Easter?

Mr. Fotos: I, we were and I still am. I not a very good Christian though. Because I go every Sunday doesn't mean I'm a good Christian. I'm really not that good of a Christian. However, my father allowed supported the Church to the end of his life, always supported the Church. He was a past council member, board member and he was an officer of the Church and acting president of the Church for some months when the Church president was in jail. Because he was vice president and he took over when the president had to go to jail. [he laughs]

Diane: Oh, all right.

Mr. Fotos: Yes. I started Greek school at the tender age of five years old. I remember it. That was when the Church was located at 6th and N, where now is located Capital Towers Apartments, 620 N Street. We used to catch the bus from McKinley Boulevard then and get off on 7th and J and walk down to N Street, 6th and N to attend Greek school.

[Counter 300]

Mr. Fotos: Yes, I went to Greek school until I was 14 years old and when I started getting, I finally quit at 14. I said “I want to play sports.” Because I couldn’t play sports because of Greek school. So finally I got to play football then. My sisters also and brothers went.

Diane: Were there any neighborhoods where Greek people were excluded from buying homes that you can recollect?

Mr. Fotos: I can’t, I personally can’t recall that. Of course, when I was in elementary school and before school, most of the older Greek families lived and congregated near the Church. They lived between say 4th Street and maybe up to about 16th Street, the great majority of them. Then they started spreading out more towards East Sacramento. Now we have a number of Greeks, of course, that live near the Church and generally towards East Sacramento. But I don’t, I can’t recall that they were particularly excluded. They may have been.

Diane: Were you ever uncomfortable in saying that you had to go to Greek school or were your friends ever liable to make fun of you or?

Mr. Fotos: Sometimes, sometimes, yes. But you know what though, Diane? Actually our parents instilled in us pride to be Greek, you know?

[Tape one, Side one]

[Counter 317]

[Tape one, Side two]

Diane: [tape begins with her speaking] Has instilled in you for your Greek heritage?

Mr. Fotos: Yes it did. It was stressed to us how so many things that we have today language, science, medicine, all that originated through the Greeks or Greece. So even as youngsters we were proud we were Greeks. So even though we may have sometimes been made fun of, it didn't bother us that much. In my era, I am 51 years old now, I didn't have it as tough as those Greek Americans that are now in their middle and late 60s. They had it a little tougher as far as ethnic prejudice. However, in going to Greek school, they would say "Greek school?" They would laugh at us a little bit there. When I was in elementary school, later it bothered me because I wanted to get into sports, which I eventually did. But when I was in elementary school, what bothered me about going to Greek school was, number one I couldn't play as often because we'd go two and sometimes three days a week after school. But I'd miss my favorite radio programs like Jack Armstrong, the All American Boy, or something like this, see?

Diane: Did you speak Greek at home or English?

Mr. Fotos: Yes.

Diane: Which was the language you were taught first?

Mr. Fotos: We spoke Greek, and as a matter of fact when I went to school being the oldest and I went to kindergarten, they sent me back the first day because the teacher said she couldn't communicate with me because I didn't even know how to speak English. But to our parents, we always spoke Greek and then they, as so many other parents in those days, they said, [spoken in Greek, he gives the translation] "At home speaks Greek, outside you will learn your English and speak English." So he even wanted us kids to speak Greek to each other, which we never did, of course, the brothers and sisters. So, even though we went to Greek school, we learned to read and write in Greek school. But really the spoken Greek was learned at home, sure.

Diane: It's been said that there were few people attending church services, I believe in the 30s or the 40s, that often on Sundays, I guess that people were too busy working, and there were very few people in attendance. Do you remember this being true? Was the church a central point of the community at that time, or?

Mr. Fotos: I think the church, again speaking for the 30s, for my practical experience, and then knowing a little bit of the prior history too. I think it was still the focal point. However, the men didn't get involved that much in the church, as much as they are now. I think it was, the women were the ones that mainly attended church as a little boy, I can remember that. Just as a little sidelight here, and you're a lot younger than I am Diane, so that the times had changed when you started going to church, but I remember when I used to go to the church in the 30s

again, and up into the 40s, right up to the 50s, you'd walk in, the family, if it was a husband and wife, sometimes the father didn't go to church though right? The men would sit on the right hand side and the women sat on the left hand side of the church. I remember that vividly because that was the way it was. I know even in America a hundred years ago it was that way. Well, one of the first impressions that I got that something was strange in there, was I was sitting on the right hand side, the boy would go with his father on the right hand side, the girls would go with the mother on the left hand side, and there was one family I saw come in and the mother, the wife and the whole family sat together on the right hand side and I was shocked as a small boy there. I figured that is a violation, I thought. I remember very well that lady and I would mention her name because she was a grand lady and that was Mrs. Pantages at the time. She was, she came over here as a little girl and of course, she is now deceased, and she defied the rules. She figured what is the difference, I came here to pray with my family together, and Mrs. Pantages was the first one that I recall of a woman sitting on the men's side of the church. Of course now it's all mixed, which is the way it should be.

[Counter 350]

Diane: Yeah. Were the men then more active in other organizations other than church or did they – ?

Mr. Fotos: Right. I think that could be true because the two major organizations in those days as far as fraternal organizations go, was AHEPA and GAPA. AHEPA was founded before GAPA, prior to GAPA. GAPA was founded several years after AHEPA. GAPA was founded

nationally in about 1927, I believe. The Sacramento chapter was founded in 1929. In fact this man Paul Maritsas of Maritsas Construction, he was the first charter president of the local organization.

Diane: What does GAPA stand for?

Mr. Fotos: Okay, that's a good question. Of course, GAPA stands for Greek American Progressive Association, and one would think maybe "well why did they need GAPA when they had AHEPA, they are both fraternal organizations, why? Because they both have the same, similar rituals. As I heard it from the old timers, with some prejudice, I'm sure, and believe me, there was prejudice and animosity, it was almost like the Democrats and Republicans, except sometimes they would get physical in those days, between those two clubs, even though they were all Greeks. AHEPA was founded from what I understand, is because there were prejudices of course, and they said:

hey, let's band together, let's get with it, let's become more Americanized so we won't be singled out, and let's learn more about America, speak the English language, and we can get better jobs and improve ourselves.

And AHEPA played a major role in doing that. I know they have. GAPA, okay, as I heard it from the old timers of GAPA, charter members of GAPA, they said GAPA was formed by AHEPAs who were disgruntled with maybe what they disagreed with and some of the aims with the AHEPA, mainly probably, was because the AHEPAs said we will speak English at our meetings, so they can learn to speak English. Which was fine when you think of their motive, actually. But sometimes our short-sidedness [speaks in Greek] and then maybe there were other reasons too. A lot of people changed their names because of the prejudices you know, even my

name is shortened, but it was shortened for another reason, not because, my name is Fotopoulos it is Fotos now. But others would change it completely, Browns and Smiths and Jones and things like this so they could get jobs, but of course the accent would give them away. [They both chuckle.] So it was an off-shoot of AHEPA from what I understand and these people said “we want to maintain our ethnic heritage, we want to maintain our religion, we are proud to be Greeks, and we want everybody to know we are Greeks. So they formed GAPA to maintain all of the Greek ways about them, and again GAPA played a major role, they both played major parts I think on the progress of the Greeks in America. The GAPA I know locally has a history of this, and in other cities in the United States too. They really, there were times where the churches were very poor in the, because it was during the Depression and they could hardly support the church. The fraternal organizations and GAPA in particular, supported the Greek schools a lot, and they maintain the Greek schools. In many cases even paid the salary of a priest just to keep the Greek religion, the Greek language, and traditions here. Now of course, we have gotten to be a very affluent society, when and sometimes I wonder about both of these great organizations, AHEPA by the way, is much, much larger, you wonder sometimes if their role hasn't maybe been fulfilled in a way, you see? But they are still wonderful organizations both of them. GAPA has lessened, diminished a lot in its membership. But non-the-less there still is a GAPA, in fact I'll be going to the National Convention in Ohio this summer. So the GAPAs and the AHEPAs they were, I remember as a kid, they were all Greeks and most all of them belong to the church, but yet, they had their differences and sometimes if a GAPA boy would date an AHEPA girl or an AHEPA girl or boy would date a GAPA girl, they'd act as if it was just like you were dating somebody from another country, you know? It was almost that bad, they'd say “oh, you know [speaks Greek] GAPA [speaks Greek] AHEPA.” It was that bad for a while.

Diane: Now your father was a GAPA?

Mr. Fotos: My father was a GAPA. My whole family was a GAPA, and of course, we automatically GAPAs. In those days we used to have a junior GAPA with boys and girls –

Diane: Is that still active?

Mr. Fotos: We don't have a junior GAPA anymore. But, in the 30s and in the 40s and early 50s the junior GAPA was very strong. It was stronger, in fact GAPA was stronger in Sacramento than AHEPA was, in the 30s and 40s. We were kids then, like 14, 15, 16 years old, and we used to give big dances, big dances. The GAPA kids used to give the big Greek-American dance. We'd have an American dance, we'd hire a 12 piece orchestra and in 1948 we'd pay \$300 for an orchestra and here we were little teen-agers and all of the adults would come because that was a chance to dance American, and we'd have it maybe at the Elks Temple downtown, or somewhere like this. Yeah, we –

[Counter 400]

Diane: And there wasn't more Greek dancing than American dancing?

Mr. Fotos: It was, we'd have an American band and then we'd play records during the intermission.

Diane: Oh.

Mr. Fotos: Yeah! That was the only real American type dance. Then of course, later, the AHEPA put on and still does, their Christmas dance, it was very nice, and it still is very nice. Sure.

Diane: Are your children members of the GAPA?

Mr. Fotos: No, [he laughs] it's hard to get anybody to join hardly nowadays. It seems like people don't want to join organizations anymore. And I think now we are more church oriented, because the church now, our church offers so much more than it did then, socially, now. That was another thing we had the junior GAPA and then the Sons' of Pericles and the AHEPA and the Maids of Athena –

Diane: Maids of Athena?

Mr. Fotos: Maids of Athena, yes. It was a social thing for them too, whereas the church then did not have a GOYA, it did not have a, it barely had a Sunday school, and the Sunday school we had when I was there was one teacher and the children would gather around her of all ages, and we'd get a little Sunday school bible lesson, [speaks Greek] a little story or parable or something, but now our church of course is highly organized and we have something I think for just about

everybody. So there is not that much need for these junior GAPA things or AHEPA I think for the youth.

Diane: When did you start your involvement with the parish council then, the church council?

Mr. Fotos: Okay, I think I first became a board member in 1962, 1962, and stayed on through 70 –

Diane: And then you became president?

Mr. Fotos: Yes, [laughs], yeah, I was president four times!

Diane: Four times?

Mr. Fotos: Four times, yeah, yeah. Three turns consecutive 65, 66, and 67, and then another term in 71.

Diane: Was it an easy job or – ?

Mr. Fotos: No. [Diane laughs] Being president or being a board member is never an easy job. But, and it's kind of a thankless job, of course. Just being a board member and especially president because the buck stops here type of thing, like that.

Diane: What are the duties, what were some of the challenges and some of the problems?

Mr. Fotos: Okay, now, when I first became a board member in 62, at that time the parish council had more power than it does today. It had even more power in the old days when I was a kid and prior to my time. Because, I'm going to regress a little bit and go back a little bit now, in those, our church in Sacramento was established in 19, well our first church building was built in 1921, our Greek community was founded in 1920 officially, and incorporated in 1920. But the parish council which they called the board of trustees in those days or the Cimbroulio [spelling] it really ran the church, literally ran the church. It ran the priest, it controlled the priest 100%. We had an Archdiocese, I think our Archdiocese was formally founded I think in 1936 in America with at that time Archbishop Athenagoras, of course he became the Patriarch later. So the poor Archdioceses didn't have any money, they hardly had any control. So actually, each little Greek community controlled the priest, and the poor priest had to do what the board of trustees or the president in those days, the president had a lot of power in those days, told them to do or else, and Sacramento in the 30s and 40s it was known nationwide among other Greek communities as a tough vigilante kind of a community, if they didn't like something they would tell the priest "your through!" They would just fire them, just like that, you see! And then hire another priest, you almost could hire your own priest in those days, you know. But now things are different, and thank goodness for that, thank goodness for that. We've become a little more civil, a lot more civil and understand the needs of the priests, of course priests used to be so terribly underpaid then, our first church at 6th and N had a little old parish house on it and it had a hall, it was an old Victorian house located behind the church and the lower level was made into the church hall, you can imagine that it wasn't very big and the priest lived upstairs. But, the

poor priest they hardly made any money, but now we see the priests as it should be, the tremendous job they have, and their humans, they have a family to support and raise, and they have their physical needs as well as spiritual, so now, thank goodness we, we recognize this and we remunerate our priests to, I think, just about, a professional level which they deserve. So thank goodness now our –

Diane: How much power did the council have when you were president?

[Counter 450]

Mr. Fotos: When I was president? Well, when I was president actually as far as hiring and firing the priest we still had that power, and we still had the power to negotiate to look for another priest. We could go out and seek a priest actually, and then tell the bishop or the Archdiocese, we would like that priest, right other there, type of thing, practically, in a simplified way. And then we'd say what we would pay them and this and that. But now as I understand it, it's a lot more formal and the community doesn't go out and select their own priest. Maybe indirectly they can, by other means, but it's the diocese is now of course our bishops have more power now, the bishop in the diocese than he did even ten years ago.

Diane: When did all of this change?

Mr. Fotos: As far as the bishop's power being increased, I believe and I may be wrong, but within the last really five or six years, certainly within the last ten years.

Diane: Oh.

Mr. Fotos: Um hum. The bishops were primarily almost just a figurehead, to be respected though, of course, and they would be troubleshooters also, but the power lay of course, back in New York, but now, they have had more authority delegated to them by the Archdiocese than they had.

Diane: Did you experience any of the turmoil or was your father involved at all when the, in the early period when there was so much disturbance in the church in Greece and emissaries would come in here – ?

Mr. Fotos: [speaks in Greek] and then the crown?

Diane: Yes.

Mr. Fotos: In Sacramento I'm sure they had their disagreements too, I'm sure they did. I know from where you grew up in San Francisco, I know they did because I know there they have the two churches were founded by the two different groups supporting them. I don't think too much, but what they did have, they did have, again, there would be a group that supported the priests sometime, another group that didn't support the priest or maybe, again, I don't want to say GAPA or AHEPA but maybe one of the fraternal groups to support the priest and the other one would be more against, and what would happen, is sometimes at these Greek picnics they would

get a little bit volatile at the Greek picnics. Now you figure these men, that most of them, unfortunately, have died now, in those days in the 30s, and maybe very early 40s, so they were really robust guys and they would get a little hot down there, and actually fisticuffs would break out over a priest, or over a Greek school teacher, and by the way Greek school teachers too were treated just terribly, and they, they lived in poverty, literally in poverty, the Greek school teachers. I remember one night the board of trustees, my father was not on the board at that time, they said "we're firing that Greek school teacher" and that's it, and his income stopped just like that, and the poor man he had luggage to move and he called up my father who had a laundry truck and I remember I was little then and we went and we helped move his luggage and took the poor man to the depot, the train depot. But I remember an incident with the priest, his name was Father Kotriulous, Patri Kotriulous, and he ended up a close friend of the family, later he went to Phoenix, Arizona, this was in 1937, in fact I've got a newspaper clipping of this at home, and a ruckus broke out at a picnic, a Greek community picnic at Helvetia Park, by the river, they used to hold a lot of picnics in Helvetia Park in those days, and somebody threatened the priest and the priest in those days, this particular priest, he was probably in his middle 60s at the time, and he carried a staff, with a sterling silver rounded handle on it you know, very distinguished looking priest, and this particular Greek threatened the priest to hit him, to punch him one, so the priest picked up his cane, his staff, and he clobbered him on the head and he split his head open. [Diane chuckles] And now it was bleeding, and the Sheriff was called, the priest was arrested, and yes, and later released. And it made the newspaper, sure. Would, it used to be a pretty exciting times, physical excitement.

Diane: I guess.

Mr. Fotos: In those days.

Diane: Any other physical times, any other riots you remember?

Mr. Fotos: Well I, somebody tells me that my father even got involved once in the fisticuffs at a Greek picnic. Again, I don't know if it was over priest politics, Greek politics, or GAPA and AHEPA, I don't know. But somebody, in fact Bekokinas [spelling], he's older now but, he remembers, he was a teen-ager at the time. I don't even know, I probably was maybe born, and again it was at Helvetia Park, and he says "somebody took a swing at your father, I remember that" he says and "your father gave him the most beautiful right cross I every saw and floored him." [Diane laughs] And this Bekokinas was a boxer at one time so he says, "yes, I'll never forget it." I don't even know to this day what that was about. But my father wasn't a violent man, it just happened. [laughs]

Diane: Oh my, it sounds like the Greek Food Festival is a little more sedate than we have now. And you've had a very active role in the Food Festivals from the very start.

Mr. Fotos: Yes.

Diane: Can you tell us a little bit about what the Greek Food Festival is?

[Counter 500]

Mr. Fotos: Coincidentally, I happened to be the first chairman of the Sacramento Greek Food Festival and I had a co-chairman, Jim Psihopedas was my co-chairman, and that was held in 1964 in the Hellenic Center. Our inspiration was the Stockton community. Because I think their the granddaddy's of the Greek Food Festivals, at least in California on the West Coast. They had, their festival going for probably four, three or four years before we even started it. They were our inspiration, and we gave our first one in 64 and held it inside the Hellenic Center for one afternoon, for about six hours in the afternoon, as an experiment to see what would happen. “Cosie” Alliopoulos - Cosmas Alliopoulos was the president then and he asked me if I'd chair it. I didn't even know the first thing about it, but we did it and we were very pleased because we raised about, we netted about \$2200 then and at that time that was the biggest single event, money raising event that we ever had and from there we've progressed and we held it, inside the next year and inside the Hellenic Center and in the courtyard of the church between church and hall. Then the following year we went to the State Fairgrounds we held two at the old Governor's Hall, State Fairgrounds. From there we even went to the Scottish Rite Temple, we've even held one Food Festival at the Country Club Plaza Mall, that was an experiment, an experience too, and then another year we held the Food Festival at Jesuit High School, and that was a logistical nightmare because we had to be in and out so as soon as school was over we were in, set up and everything, and then when the festival was over, it was a one day festival on Sunday, we had to haul everything out so the school could start Monday morning. Of course, we've had at least ten of our festivals on our church grounds and the courtyard outside, and it got to be so big and so popular that we had to leave our site which we all miss, even the non-Greeks say “we love it here at the Fairgrounds, it's nice, it's beautiful and big, but we miss the intimacy

and of the church grounds.” There is no place like home because we have our church there, we had our Hellenic Center and all of that. However, we were bursting at the seams, so the last three years we’ve held our festival at Building C at Cal Expo, which is a humungous building and have had great success there, and this year we are going to be holding it at the Community Center downtown.

Diane: How much preparation goes into this event?

Mr. Fotos: Much. [Diane laughs] Much. [he laughs] Believe me. It’s gotten to be, it almost needs to have a permanent organization to conduct and organize the festival now. Oh, all right, I’ll put it this way, our festival this year is going to be held again in September, we’ve, we have a steering committee, a four man steering committee and it’s headed by Jim Psihopedas, the chairman this year, and we have been meeting for the last three months. In other words, we started meeting late, actually late 83. A lot of preparation, incredible preparation. And thank God for the spirit and support of our members, and thank God in particular for our wonderful ladies, primarily Philoptochos ladies for the Greek pastries they make and just general cooperation, everybody cooperates beautifully.

Diane: Preparing all the food. So you see it as pulling the community together as if they’d –

Mr. Fotos: Definitely, and it creates even another great sense of pride because we have the chance, and opportunity to show a little bit about our tradition, our religion, our social spirits and handiworks and culture.

Diane: And it's obviously as successful today or even more so, than it was at the beginning.

Mr. Fotos: Exactly, sure, I can remember the profits for the first three, four festivals, we went like \$2200, then we made \$4000, then we made \$5500, and then \$6000, and all of a sudden we hit the \$10000 we cleared \$10000, for a one day festival. That was fantastic! Then pretty soon we hit \$17000 for one day. Then we went into two days, and we made \$19000. So the last several years, for our church and for the church's programs, we've been hitting in the vicinity for the last couple of years around \$60000 some odd, clear, after! But now, we're now at two and a half days.

Diane: That's very good. It shows that the community is certainly as active today and you and your family are as active today as you have been all these years and thank you very much for a very interesting interview.

Mr. Fotos: Thank you, Diane.

[Tape one, Side two ends]

[Interview ends, Counter 538]